DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 099 391 SP 008 709

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TITLE Three Years of Collaboration in the Development of Portal Schools.
PUB DATE Jun 74
NOTE 11p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *College School Cooperation; Consortia; *Decision Making; Interinstitutional Cooperation; *Laboratory Schools; Performance Based Teacher Education; *Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS Kansas; *Portal Schools; Teacher Corps

ABSTRACT

In 1971 six rural, eastern Kansas School Districts collaborated with Kansas State Teachers College in the development of portal schools. Four-year goals and first-year objectives were established and a steering committee comprised of representatives of each significant role group was organized to transact business associated with the development of portal schools. After a year and a half, it became apparent that the attempt at collaborative decision making was unsuccessful. Therefore, a new model was developed based on the assumptions that; (a) the controllers of resources must be willing to share their power by responding to inputs from role groups, (b) the purpose and limits of the consortium must be clearly defined and agreed to by all parties, (c) a process for input and shared decision making must be clearly defined, (d) commitment to the endeavor by member institutions is directly related to the amount of its resources invested, and (e) two decision-making bodies, one consisting of resource controllers and the other consisting of role group representatives, must be organized. The implementation of this model involved the formation of a Council of Administrators (resource controllers) and Master Steering Committee (role group representatives), development of an agreement document, specification of the decision-making process, and an increase in the amount of resources invested by each institution. Significant and encouraging developments have resulted from implementation of the new model. (HMD)

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THREE YEARS OF COLLABORATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PORTAL SCHOOLS

by

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June 1974

In the summer of 1971, six rural school districts in eastern Kansas began a collaborative effort with Kansas State Teachers College toward the development of Portal Schools. This consortium, which had as its primary purpose the development of field teacher training centers, was begun as part of a Teacher Corps project. A Teacher Corps director, a chairman of a department of Curriculum and Instruction, and two high school principals developed a set of four-year goals, as well as first year objectives. A steering committee with representatives from all significant role groups was organized to meet bimonthly to transact business related to Portal School development.

For the next year and one-half, those persons most directly responsible for the Teacher Corps project observed and recorded a journal of negative findings. Both the Teachers College and the public schools continued to operate and make decisions as they had before with the exception that each school had a team of interns, a team leader, and inservice training which was conducted in the field by the Teachers College. The attendance at steering committee meetings deteriorated over the next year and one-half. Most school superintendents and college administrators either failed to make steering committee meetings or would send a substitute. Those administrators who did attend seemed to dominate the meetings with representatives from teachers, students, and community role groups hardly ever making an input. In fact, the turnover from one meeting to the next was so great that much time was spent in explaining the purpose of the steering committee and shared decision-making. Except for participating in a discrepancy evaluation, nothing significant seemed to take place at steering committee meetings.

During the fall of the second year of our Portal School development effort, it became clear to the staff in the Teacher Corps project that collaboration was not really working, even though the Teachers College and six unified school districts were cooperating in a teacher training effort.

After taking a hard look at our attempts at shared decision-making during the first year and one-half of operation, a new model for collaboration was developed based on a series of assumptions which grew out of our experience data bank. The assumptions on which the new model was based were:

1. There are at least three distinct groups in a collaborative effort each with a unique role and function:

    a. There are the "controllers of resources" or the administrators who, because of their authority, have the power to make decisions which can give life to a consortium or which can crush its existence.

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b. There are the "role groups," (teachers, parents, students, etc) who are affected by the decisions of the first group, but whose voices are vital to a truly shared decision-making effort.

c. There are the "task groups" whose responsibility it is to plan and implement programs agreed to by collaborative decision-making bodies.

2. For collaboration to be functional, the controllers of resources must be willing to share their power by responding to input from role groups.

3. Collaboration is more functional when the controllers of resources from the various institutions in a consortium form a shared decision-making body which operates separately from a shared decision-making body comprised of representatives of significant role groups in the consortium. For collaboration, these two decision-making bodies must agree.

4. For collaboration to be functional, the purpose and limits of the consortium must be clearly defined and agreed to by all parties involved.

5. The commitment to shared decision-making by member institutions in a consortium is directly related to the investment of its own resoureces in the shared effort.

6. For collaboration to be functional, a process for input and shared decision-making must be clearly defined and understood by all role groups.

These assumptions had important implications for a new model.

First of all, a Council of Administrators for Portal Schools was formed comprised of the Council of Deans at the College, the Superintendents from each of the six Portal School districts, and a representative from the State Department of Education. This group of administrators, who have direct control over the resources available to the consortium of Portal Schools, began to meet normally and dealt mainly with policies of operation.

Secondly, a Master Steering Committee was formed comprised of a minimum of two representatives from each Portal School site and a minimum of two representatives of the following role groups: teachers, students, team leaders, interns, parents, and principals. This group also met monthly and was concerned primarily with monitoring and evaluating Portal School program operation.

The third major step in the implementation of a new model for collaboration was the development of a Portal School Agreement document which (1) stated the primary areas of mutual endeavor to be served by the collaborative effort, (2) specified what each of the parties in the collaborative effort would contribute and be responsible for, (3) clarified the benefits to be gained as a member party in the consortium, and (4) defined the shared decision-making bodies which would govern the development and operation of the consortium.

The Portal School Agreement document was developed through input from all role groups and was revised several times before it was accepted by both the Council of Administrators and the Master Steering Committee. A copy of the Portal School Agreement document is presented on the following pages:

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THE CONSORTIUM OF PORTAL SCHOOLS OF EASTERN KANSAS

PORTAL SCHOOL AGREEMENT

In an effort to develop a Portal School at _____ High School, Kansas State Teachers College and _____ Unified School District No. _____ do mutually agree that the College will:

1. Supply student teachers on a semester basis in subject areas requested by the school district subject to the presence of approved cooperating teachers. The College will make every possible effort to meet requests for student teachers in specific academic areas. If personnel are not available on this campus, the Coordinator of Student Teaching will take the initiative to contact other teacher training institutions to provide the desired student teachers.

2. Provide field-centered education to the public school faculty in the basic teaching competencies (diagnostic, designing individualized instruction, and teacher-student interaction skills) necessary for a successful performance-based education curriculum.

3. Provide education for Master Teacher candidates in competencies required for the academic areas, supervision, and training of interns and student teachers.

4. Provide education to the public school faculty in innovative curricular and instructional practices that will be introduced in the school.

5. Provide resource consultants in subject areas for curriculum improvement and development.

6. Provide assistance to the public school in areas of special needs (i.e., reading programs, student evaluation, differentiated learning patterns, etc.)

7. Provide assistance in a district-wide educational needs assessment.

8. Develop a competency-based, field-centered teacher education program equivalent to twenty semester hours of professional education (secondary).

9. Develop an experimental program to offer graduate education (Master's Degree level) to inservice teachers that is competency-based and field-centered.

It is further agreed that the public school named above will:

1. Provide a variety of field learning experiences in a professional competency-based teacher education program under the supervision of a Master Teacher for graduate interns and undergraduate student teachers. These field experiences should include:

a. team teaching

b. tutoring

c. approximately nine weeks for graduate interns to have the primary responsibility for the design, implementation and evaluation of instruction under the close supervision of a Master Teacher who, in cooperation with a representative of the college, is responsible for the evaluation of the teacher in training as to the accomplishment of compentencies.

d. approximately six weeks for undergraduate student teachers to have the primary responsibility for the design, implementation and evaluation of instruction under the close supervision of a Master Teacher who, in cooperation with a representative of the college, is responsible for the evaluation of the teacher in training as to the accomplishment of competencies.

2. Provide instruction, supervision and evaluation, in cooperation with college personnel, for graduate interns and undergraduate student teachers in counseling and guidance, community involvement and professional relations.

3. Set up and maintain a differentiated staffing pattern consisting of an undergraduate student teacher, a graduate intern, and a Master Teacher as a teaching team (in the future a junior observer aide will be added to the team).

4. Establish long-range goals for Portal School Development with tasks to be accomplished for achieving these goals.

5. Plan and implement a district-wide educational needs assessment with the assistance of Kansas State Teachers College and the Kansas Department of Education.

6. Develop an Adaptive Curriculum that is more personalized to better meet individual student needs.

7. Develop an inservice education plan to assist the school faculty in Portal School Development.

8. Establish a Teacher Training Center Facility in the public school where learning materials and resources can be used by faculty, interns and student teachers and where microteaching can take place.

9. Provide opportunities for community-based education and for community-wide involvement in the education program.

10. The Portal School agrees to give preference to Kansas State Teachers College for student teacher positions in the Portal Schools.

11. Not in any sense use the teacher-in-training as a substitute teacher.

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It is further mutually agreed that shared decision-making in the development and operation of the Portal School will take place in the following manner:

1. *An active local steering committee consisting of representatives from all role or interest groups, i.e., representatives from the Teachers College, the Public School, the Board of Education, and the community. The local steering committee will be an advisory body to the local school administration.*

2. *An active master steering committee consisting of representatives from the following role groups:*

   a. *Community Representative(s)*

   b. *Representative Parent(s)*

   c. *Public School Teacher Representative(s)*

   d. *Public School Student Representative(s)*

   e. *College Student Representative (Junior or Senior in Secondary Education)*

   f. *College Faculty Member, School of Education and Psychology*

   g. *Administrator(s) from Portal School(s)*

   h. *Teacher Corps Intern Representative(s)*

   i. *Council on Teacher Education Representative(s)*

   j. *Teacher Corps Team Leader Representative(s)*

Each Portal School must have at least two representatives on the Master Steering Committee. The Master Steering Committee will be an advisory body to Kansas State Teachers College in the Portal School Development program.

3. *A Council of Administrators for Portal Schools will consist of the following personnel:*

   a. *The Superintendent of each Portal School District*

   b. *The Dean of the School of Education and Psychology*

   c. *The Dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Sciences*

   d. *The Dean of the School of Applied Arts and Sciences*

   e. *The Dean of the School of Graduate and Professional Studies*

   f. *The Dean of Academic Services*

   g. *The Vice-President for Academic Affairs*

h. *The Chairman of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction*

i. *The President of the Faculty Senate*

j. *The Coordinator of Student Teaching*

k. *The Director of Teacher Corps*

l. *The Commissioner of Education, State of Kansas, or his representative*

This council will serve as a decision-making body in approving Master Teacher candidates and major Portal School policies that involve both the public schools and Kansas State Teachers College.

It is further mutually agreed that Kansas State Teachers College and the public school listed above will work with the State Department of Education toward achieving competency-based teacher certification through a refining of teacher competencies and the establishment of criterion levels for teacher performance.

The agreement between Kansas State Teachers College and _____ Unified School District No. _____ is not a legal document, but represents a firm committment to the development and operation of a Portal School by the parties concerned. This agreement is for the period of one year and renewable thereafter.

_____

President, Kansas State Teachers College

_____

Date

_____

Superintendent of Schools, USD No. _____

_____

Date

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First, the attendance at monthly meetings of the Council of Administrators and of the Master Steering Committee has been excellent. Significant discussions of common problems relating to training and school operation have taken place between the deans at the College and the school superintendents. The vice-president of academic affairs has attended most of the Council meetings and occasionally the president of the College has attended the monthly meetings of the Council. Likewise, the Master Steering Committee has enabled the representatives from the various role groups to have more of a voice in decision-making, as they have the right to reject and/or modify decisions of the Council of Administrators. No longer dominated by superintendents, the Master Steering Committee has developed its own power base, and there has been a marked increase in the number of inputs to the decision-making process by the members of the Master Steering Committee. The Master Steering Committee, on a number of occasions, has modified the Council's proposed plans of action before giving their approval. Recently, the Master Steering Committee has requested to send an observer to the Council of Administrators as a vehicle of improved communications between the two groups.

Secondly, there has been a significant number of important actions taken during the past year as a result of collaboration. For example, the team leader/adjunct professor at a Portal School site has been able to offer graduate training as College faculty in areas when he/she has the required qualifications. A program to develop a list of Master Teacher Competencies is in progress as a joint effort between public school teachers and College faculty with the superintendents and deans filling a leadership role. A plan to develop a central document clearing-house and resource center for Portal Schools was introduced by a team leader and acted on by the Council and the Master Steering Committee. A task group is presently developing a plan to expand the Portal School concept to elementary schools as a result of the input of elementary principals followed by consortium action. Guidelines to expand the Portal School concept to include field academic learning centers for youth and adults resulted when a superintendent brought a need to the Council of Administrators and followed the shared decision-making process.

Probably the most vivid example of collaboration in action occurred several months ago when two superintendents in the Council of Administrators and a team leader in the Master Steering Committee raised the issue that the Teachers College was not fulfilling its agreement to supply the Portal School sites with the minimum number of semester student teachers. As a result of the shared decision-making process, an indepth study was made of the situation. Following the study, some far-reaching policy changes regarding the teacher training program at the Teachers College were made to affect the long-term and immediate problem of encouraging student teachers to train in Portal School sites.

While the collaboration model which has been in operation for the past year has produced encouraging results, it has not prevented member institutions from occasionally making unilateral decisions in areas where they agreed to collaborate. Nor has the model been adequate in enabling member institutions to give their attention to long-term goals of the consortium when faced with day-to-day crises.

It seems difficult to habitually share decisions with other institutions or with those who are in less powerful positions when we have learned so well to operate independently with a great deal of autonomy.

In addition to a Portal School Agreement document signed by the member school districts and the Teachers College, a process for collaborative decision-making was developed which would allow the input from any individual or role group in the consortium to be processed for action. However, it would require that both the Council of Administrators and the Master Steering Committee separately agree by consensus to any major decision that affects either the policy or the operation of Portal Schools. Thus, any input which was introduced in the Council of Administrators and processed for action required the approval of the Master Steering Committee or modification until approval could be obtained. Likewise, any input which was introduced in the Master Steering Committee and agreed to was sent to the Council of Administrators for their action and for the allocation of resources to implement policy or a specific program. Since a consensus was required in both the Council and the Master Steering Committee, any role group had veto power over any decision.

In the Consortium of Portal Schools of Eastern Kansas, the Teacher Corps project served mainly as a task force which will disappear as Portal Schools become operational within the regular budgets of member institutions. Since the Teacher Corps proposal was developed as a collaborative effort, the Teacher Corps proposal served as the major policy document for Portal School development and operation. Changes from the guidelines stated in the proposal were processed as amendments. Included as the following page is a simplified diagram of the collaborative dicision-making process for the Consortium of Portal Schools of Eastern Kansas.

In this process, any input acted upon by both the Council and the Steering Committee is given to a planning task group or implementation task group. The members of the task group and supportive money and material are resources allocated by the Council. A planning task group develops a plan and reports back to the two decision-making bodies. Resources are then allocated for program implementation. An implementation task group carries out the program according to plan. It is the responsibility of the decision-making bodies to monitor and evaluate the progress of the task groups. Evaluation of program planning and/or implementation can at any time serve as new inputs for the decision-making process.

A fifth and final effort to effect a more productive collaborative model was made by obtaining a commitment from each of the member school districts and from the Teachers College to invest a larger amount of their own resources in the consortium. For each small rural school district, this means contributing up to one-half of the adjunct professor's salary at each Portal School site, thus matching the dollar amount contributed by the school district. The rationale for this effort was to encourage real commitment to the Portal School Consortium and to create staff positions that would be shared between the College and the school district.

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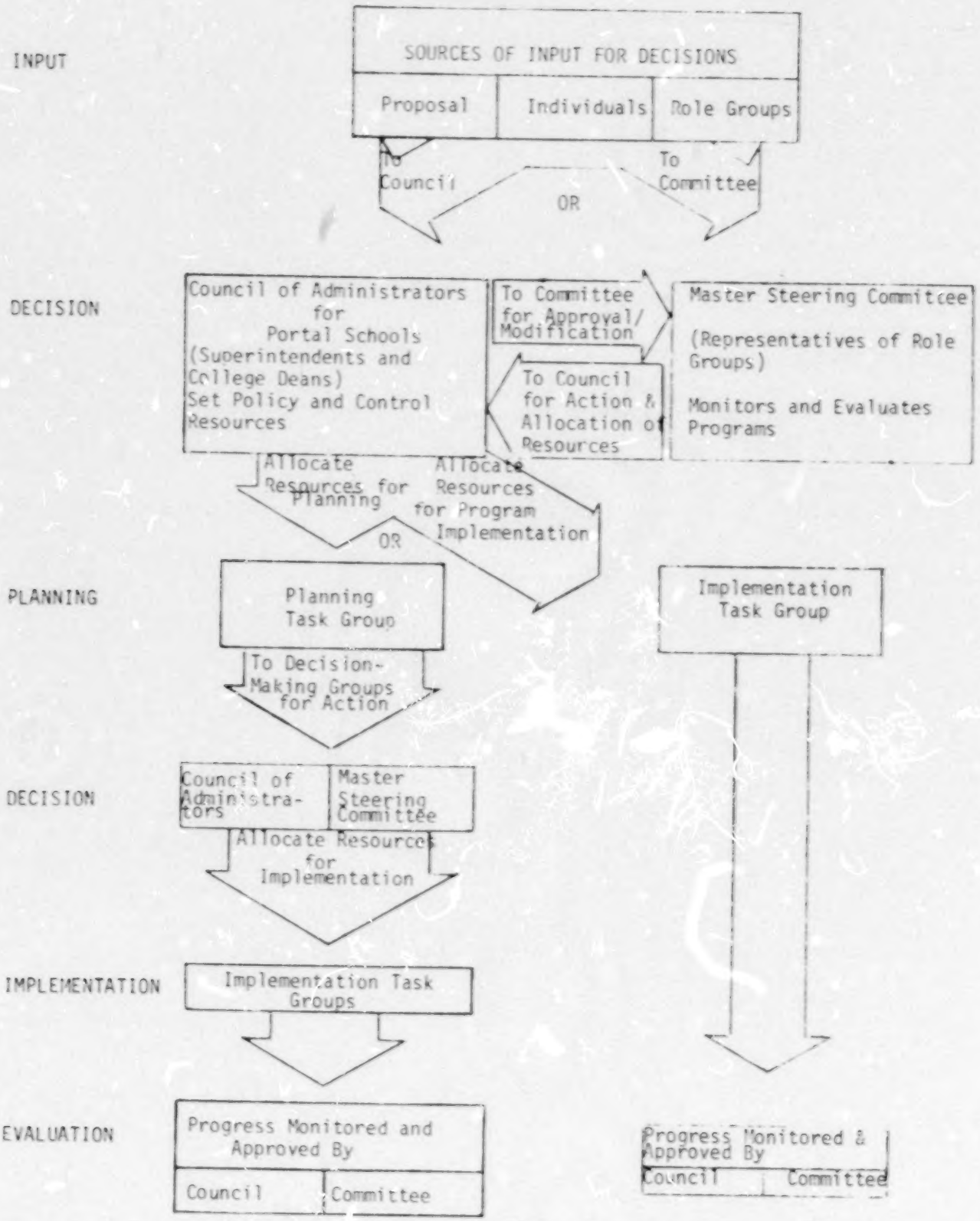
THE COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS



The new model for collaboration has been in operation for a little more than one year. Needless to say, it has not eliminated all of the problems in achieving true shared decision-making, nor have the efforts during the past year produced the ideal consortium. However, after changing our operating structure to include (1) the Council of Administrators, (2) the Master Steering Committee, (3) a Portal School Agreement document, (4) a specified decision-making process, and (5) the investment of additional resources, some very significant developments have taken place which we believe are most encouraging.

The experiences of the consortium for Portal Schools in eastern Kansas strongly suggests that there can be some very worthwhile benefits gained through collaboration provided that a workable model is developed and implemented. However, one should remember the suggestions presented by Bill Smith, Director of Teacher Corps at the Gainesville Conference on Collaboration, "begin small and realize that collaboration requires a great deal of time."